

## **Politics as Anti-Politics: The World Bank's Neopopulist Agenda<sup>1</sup>**

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### ABSTRACT

Building on the case of the Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS), this working paper provides an analysis of the World Bank's new aid allocation mechanisms in relation to representative politics. As such, this paper provides an analysis of why parliaments have overwhelmingly been bypassed in the PRS process and more interestingly, how they have come to be replaced *de facto* by certain depoliticised segments of civil society. It is argued that PRS are mechanisms by which the Bank attempts to construct a new mode of authority by attempting to capture, coopt and mobilise civil society elements behind the market agenda. Such process represents a form of neopopulism that bypasses existing political arrangements and substitutes new forms of social contract with newly depoliticised stakeholders. The paper concludes by analysing the possible impact of such changes on issues of rights, citizenship and political contestation.

Key words: World Bank, Poverty Reduction Strategies, Parliaments, Democracy, Civil society, Participation

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## **Introduction**

Building on the case of the Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS), this working paper provides an analysis of the World Bank's new aid allocation mechanisms in relation to representative politics.

If the participatory agenda rooted at the heart of the new international aid architecture has offered new opportunities for different actors to participate in their country's PRS, not all members of society have been granted a seat at the table. Participation therefore, is effectively an instrument by which some groups are given access and others are being marginalised. While debates have been raging on the quality of Civil Society Organisations (CSO) participation in PRS, there has curiously been very little discussion over the significant absence of Members of Parliament (MPs) from the process. Until recently, the Bank has been keen to justify such absence by emphasising MPs' long lasting record of predatory behaviour as well as their lack of capacity. And there is no doubt such behaviour has been endemic in the parliaments of many countries under reform. However, after years of excluding parliamentarians from the PRS process, the Bank has recently developed an interest in them.

Beyond the clear attempt to infuse legitimacy within the reform process, this paper suggests that PRS are mechanisms by which the Bank attempts to construct a new mode of authority by attempting to capture, coopt and mobilise civil society elements behind the market agenda. As such, this paper provides an analysis of why parliaments have overwhelmingly been bypassed in the PRS process and more interestingly, how they have come to be replaced *de facto* by certain segments of civil society. The argument here is that this represents a form of neopopulism that bypasses existing political arrangements and substitutes new forms of social contract with newly depoliticised stakeholders. As such, PRS establish technocratic precedents which aim to free the state from what is perceived as the debilitating effects of political bargaining (Jayasuriya 2001: 1). Such a clear anti-political framework brings forth serious concerns in relation to the Bank's failure to acknowledge the benefits of politics as a

mechanism for societal deliberation. Crucially, such process marginalises issues linked to rights, citizenship and political contestation.

This working paper is divided into four sections. The first part provides an analysis of the politics of defining the concept of civil society. Following this, the problematic of replacing existing representation structures such as the institution of parliament with a participatory process based on the illusive civil society is analysed. In the third part of the paper, it is argued that the anti-democratic sentiments evident within the Bank's new aid model has resulted in ambivalent attitudes towards the representative process within second and third generations of PRS. It will become apparent that there has been a shift in the Bank's take on the involvement of parliamentarians. While MPs were once defined as problematic and unmanageable, more recent World Bank documents now define them as new allies against corruption and a source of legitimacy for the reforms. In addressing such recent shifts in the Bank's perception of parliaments, the last section of this paper offers a discussion on the issue of political representation in the Bank's attempt to reach out to MPs and certain segments of civil society.

The leading argument of this paper is to correlate the World Bank's narrative and practices to promoting neopopulism in countries under reform, a process which curtails the realm of political society. In turn, it is argued that objectives of the Bank's new narrative and aid allocation mechanisms are to redefine the very concept of citizenship.

### ***1. The Politics of Entrapment: Civil Society vis-à-vis the State***

In order to disentangle the World Bank's elusive narrative on the new aid architecture – which is loosely attached to the Millennium Development Goals and promotes positive concepts such as participation and ownership – from the concrete aid allocation mechanisms it has recently promoted – such as the PRS<sup>i</sup>, we here propose the use of the term 'Integrated Development Model' (IDM)<sup>ii</sup>. Such term thus takes into account the existing contradictions within the Bank's new aid paradigm<sup>iii</sup> – which emerged out of the Wolfensohn era – whereby a social development narrative often clashes with geo-political realities and pro-market

objectives. The IDM is thus an important tool to differentiate the Bank's narrative from what is actually being carried out in countries under reform. This translates the argument by which the aid reform is on the one hand, far more than a mere discursive shift at the Bank and on the other hand, that it cannot solely be assessed by its aid allocation mechanisms. In other words, the IDM is both a theory – which is overwhelmingly rooted in New Institutional Economics; a social narrative seeking legitimacy both for the Bank itself and for its policies; and finally, a method to carry out the ideas of the post-Washington Consensus.

In this section, it is argued that if the PRS process does introduce important roles for civil society that transcends a mere cosmetic attempt to provide legitimacy, these changes nevertheless have political ramifications for the exercise of state authority. As such, civil society's participatory roles within the PRS process imply a new view of civil society which is closely linked to neopopulism – here defined as a form of rule that seeks to bypass existing political arrangements and to introduce new forms of social contract to stakeholders.

It is well established that civil society is a very elusive concept (Biekart 1999; Edwards 2004; Rooy 1997; Wood 1990). It has many definitions and serves the purpose of various political interests. Everyone across the political spectrum – from the far right to the far left – have been embracing it. As observed by Edwards:

Conservatives see associations as vehicles for rebuilding traditional moral values while progressives see them as vehicles for rebuilding whole societies, and the world. [...] Increasingly, it seems, voluntary associations are expected to organize social services, govern local communities, solve the unemployment problem, save the environment, and still have time left over for rebuilding the moral life of nations (2004: 19).

Defining the concept of civil society is therefore rarely a politically neutral exercise.

While the Left traditionally used civil society as a collective noun to represent the poor and oppressed, neoliberals have frowned on the concept all together, preferring to deal with individuals operating within a series of voluntary transactions. On the one hand, such individuals may constitute a progressive and self-reliant force that flourishes without the state

while on the other hand, they may form predatory coalitions in search of rents. Such dual analysis of civil society by the neoliberals<sup>iv</sup> remains the key to understanding the ongoing contradictions emerging from the PRS experiences. The Bank's choice to make civil society's participation one of the main pillars of the IDM reflects the newly pragmatic approach adopted by the institution. It reflects the difficulties faced by the Bank in imposing markets and 'good governance' throughout the 1990s and the need to implement a strategy to capture, co-opt and mobilise civil society behind the market agenda.

While the emphasis is most often given to the positive functions of NGOs, such as their abilities to better reach the poorest and to represent them, civil society also has important downsides. The fragmentation of NGO membership sheds doubt on their representative nature: What voices do they represent? What accountability structures do they really have? In reality, NGOs are extremely diversified and they also face accountability problems and legitimacy crisis.

While granting legitimacy to the reform process, donors have also come to depend on NGOs technical functions in the development industry. In such a context, the 'representative' nature of NGOs has to be questioned. As Paul (1996) – the Executive Director of Global Policy Forum – observes in his discussion of the World Bank 'partnerships' with NGOs, there are important concerns that, with its enormous wealth, the Bank is able: 'to "buy" small grassroots NGOs in the South, to gain legitimacy for its projects'. One might recall that donors' interest in civil society emerged out of the troubled waters of the early 1990s, when they finally addressed the governance predicament of the states under reform. NGOs then became a way to channel donors' moneys away from corrupt bureaucrats and failed institutions. External funding to NGOs mushroomed throughout the 1990s, a phenomenon that was equalled only by the astonishing multiplication of non-profit organisations across the Global South.

Beyond their obvious financial dependence on foreign donor agents, NGOs do not necessarily have accountable structures and their membership often remains difficult to

assess. Furthermore, NGO members may sometimes adopt a certain position simply to seek more funding or maintaining it. As observed by Carroll during the participatory process in a Country Assistance Strategy: ‘NGOs were vocal at the CAS meeting and they present a position that they know what’s going on. But they have an interest. NGOs don’t want to break down the problem’ (Carroll 2007: 620). Not only do NGOs often choose to act in a way which they know will please their funding partners but they also have an unspoken interest in a specific problem to continue in order for their source of funding to be maintained. In their study of the PRS process, Molenaers and Renard:

And not to forget, creating wide debate within civil society, with the prospect of becoming an interlocutor for the donor community and the government, can wet the appetite of ambitious civil society entrepreneurs, resulting in clashes of interest, both ideological and material, among poorly organized and often autocratically managed pressure groups, NGOs, trade unions, human rights groups, and the like. (Molenaers and Renard 2006: 16)

This point further relates to the greater debate of the ‘NGOisation’ of development which refers to the politics of NGO proliferation in the last decades<sup>v</sup> (see Edwards 2004; Hearn 2007; Rooy 1997). In her extensive study of civil society building in Africa, Hearn observes that bilateral and multilateral donors have contributed throughout the 1990s, to build a very specific kind of ‘civil society’:

[...] foreign support to civil society in all three countries [Ghana, South Africa and Uganda], is not about the breadth and depth of actually existing, largely rural based civil society. Donors are not funding the popular sector of society, but are strengthening a new African elite committed to the promotion of a limited form of procedural democracy and structural-adjustment-type economic policies in partnership with the West. The sixty or so organizations that I identified as donor-funded form the core of the kind of liberal civil society that is being ‘socially engineered’ in Africa (Hearn 1999: 4).

While the new development model is presented under the umbrella of inclusiveness, it seems that, in practice, it might actually do the exact opposite. As argued by Harriss, there is a “dark side” here as NGOs can also be rent seeking: ‘A moment’s reflection shows that ‘social

capital' for one group of people may constitute 'social exclusion' for others [...]' (2002: 8).

The World Bank's approach to civil society is highly depoliticised both in terms of its composition and its political function. On the one hand, the Bank reduces civil society's legitimate composition – only the poor are legitimate interlocutors, non-poor voices are disregarded – and on the other hand it confines civil society's participation to a very specific areas of debate (Lafortune 2003). Hickey and Mohan suggest that there are many problems associated with the current involvement of CSOs, the first being their 'confused status between civic, public and private institutional spheres' (2005: 241). In redirecting the state's traditional function as provider of rights (civil, political and socio-economic), it is now civil society that is increasingly entrusted with the responsibility for promoting the common good. As Kamat underlines, there has been a curious shift in who bears the legitimacy of such responsibility:

In a curious flip-flop of what served as a universal conceptual frame for development planning, the state, today, is represented as fragmented by private interests (otherwise referred to as corruption), and hence inept at representing the will of the people, whereas civil society is seen as the honest broker of 'the people's interests' (2004: 160).

This all derives from the neoliberal view of the state (with its roots in modernisation theory of the 1960s) as a neutral adjudicator of competing demands, implementer of policies that provide the common good – a highly abstracted and technocratic interpretation of its role and power. The entry of NGOs into the equation can thus be seen as a reaction to a breakdown of state capacity after more than two decades of neoliberal policy reform. While the attention now paid to NGOs is intended to address the effects of drastic economic medicine prescribed by the International Financial Institutions in the last decades, it also potentially undermines NGO functions in the very framework within which they are integrated (see Carroll 2007; Harriss 2002; Hearn 1999; Jayasuriya 2001; 2006; Rooy 1997). Furthermore, the idea of NGOs as an alternative to the existing state opens to door to chaos and uncertainty. The idea that NGOs can be more efficient and cheaper in providing services than the state remains

questionable. As argued by Rooy: ‘Policies that promote civil society organizations to the detriment of functioning state services may do no one any favours’ (1997: 17).

It is indeed revealing that organisations with a strong political mandate – such as trade unions and members of parliament – are often noticeably absentees from the PRS process. In fact, civil society – or rather elements of it – are given a voice in what are essentially technical matters of implementation. While a small proportion of society is given a voice on matters that do not influence the organisation of power, concepts of rights and democracy are subsumed, together with the representative role of parliaments and political parties. This is the subject of the remaining sections of this paper.

## **2.     *The Ambiguity of Ownership: Parliaments and the PRS Process***

The growing trend towards the cooption of NGOs within the new aid architecture brings forth the question of democratic representation within countries under reform. There is indeed a greater agenda which appears to be intrinsically rooted at the very core of the IDM’s philosophy which is linked to neopopulism. It is here argued that the Bank has chosen the path of technocratic populism rather than helping to build effective democracies in countries under reform. Such thesis is argued in the following sections, first by addressing the role assigned to the institution of parliament in the PRS process and then by tackling the implications of such roles on the very idea of democracy and citizenship.

Shifting toward IDM in the late 1990s, the Bank’s narrative became highly focused on ‘country ownership’ and ‘participation’ and national parliaments gradually received more attention. In fact, while the World Bank has done some capacity building work related to parliaments since 1995, it is the Comprehensive Development Framework and the following PRS that prompted the institution to give greater attention to parliaments:

Since the late eighties, a wave of democratization has swept the world. [...] With that dramatic rise [of elected democracies] comes a marked increase in the number of elected officials [...]. It’s an impact that has not been overlooked by the World Bank.



‘Development clearly works best when the process is country-led and based on partnerships’, says World Bank president James D. Wolfensohn. The World Bank strongly encourages parliamentary involvement in the development process. [...] In keeping with this global expansion of parliamentarians, the World Bank has stepped up the ways in which the members of parliament and Bank staff can exchange information and gain greater understanding of the impact of development – both at a local and global level (World Bank 2006b).

Today, the World Bank’s programs toward parliaments are initiated via three central sources: the Development Policy Dialogue Team, the World Bank Institute (WBI) and the capacity building programs, country offices and country teams. They are also reflected in the Bank’s support for partnerships and programs more generally. These initiatives are defined by the Bank as the institution’s official attempt to open up a debate with broader constituencies (Interview with Bas, November 17, 2006). According to Jean-Christophe Bas, the Manager of the Development Policy Dialogue at the World Bank, the Bank has become a ‘dialogue facilitator’ for a greater involvement of MPs in the development process (Interview November 17, 2006).

However PRS experiences have so far shown little participation of parliamentarians in the process, a fact that Alan Gelb, Director of the Development Policy at the World Bank openly acknowledged<sup>vi</sup> (Interview September 18, 2006). Eberlei and Henn’s analysis of the PRS experience in Sub-Saharan Africa concludes that: ‘[...] little attention was given – in either theory or practice – to the people’s representatives, the parliaments’ (2003: 27). World Development Movement further concludes that the participation of MPs has been limited in more than 26 countries (Jones and Hardstaff 2005: 18).

In the majority of the PRS cases where parliaments were indeed involved, the participation was limited to a few MPs participating in workshops, without a link to the institution of parliament itself (Eberlei and Henn 2003; Gould and Ojanen 2003; Jones and Hardstaff 2005; Youash 2003). Other organisations such as the Overseas Development Institute and the

European Commission have also expressed concern regarding the relative failure to involve parliaments in the PRS process (Leautier 2002: 180). Gould and Ojanen's findings on Tanzania are more than revealing of such trend as they observe: 'In fact, most parliamentarians interviewed for this study had never heard of the PRSP [Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper]' (2003: 94).

This lack of attention to the legislative branch in the PRS process is customarily explained by the fact that parliaments often face fundamental constraints of all sorts that hamper their representative, legislative and oversight functions. As summarised by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, these failures are often linked to the: '[...] lack of technical expertise, the lack of funds, and the lack of access to information' and 'last, but hardly least, whether parliamentarians have the political will to use their oversight functions' (2002: 24). It is indeed undeniable that parliaments' institutional weaknesses are often linked to the scarcity of resources and lack of institutional infrastructures such as electoral commissions, ombudsmen, parliamentary oversight committees, highly-trained civil servants in both central and local government, police forces, schools, and accessible, impartial judicial systems (Commonwealth Secretariat 2003: 12). One might observe however that some of these deficiencies have paradoxically been directly weakened by more than twenty years of structural adjustment programs in many African countries.

Crucially, donors' disinterest in parliaments in the last decade is undeniably linked to neopatrimonial tendencies of many parliamentarians. Politics is often linked to patronage by which well-connected individual voters expect a direct form of assistance from their MP, which translates into a patron-client form of politics (UNDP n.d.), or as Bayart coined it 'la politique du ventre' (1992). Eberlei and Henn argue that Africa is plagued by neopatrimonialism, which symptoms are: '[...] presidentialism, clientism and the use of state resources for the purposes of political legitimisation. In many African countries, members of parliament in particular are still tainted as being part of the system of organised political patronage' (2003: 21-14).

There is no doubt that MPs long lasting record of predatory behaviour has been endemic in many countries under reform, notwithstanding parliamentarians' chronic lack of capacity. However, in opting to bypass parliaments altogether, the PRS model has been facing a crisis in legitimacy, as analysed in the following section.

### 3. *Acknowledging Parliaments*

In this part, the Bank's recent initiatives to mainstream parliamentary involvement in the PRS process are analysed. After an assessment of the new IDM's narrative on parliamentarians, an analysis of the specific role it now envisions for the formerly marginalised actor is provided.

The World Bank has increasingly acknowledged its failure to emphasise the important role parliaments could play in the PRS process. At the heart of the problem was the fact that PRS were facing an immediate legitimacy crisis linked to the obvious failure to involve the representative of the people within the so-called participatory process. For Leautier, the Vice President of the World Bank Institute, the ownership imperative does serve to: '[...] avoid potential criticisms that policies and priorities are being imposed by the Washington-based institutions' (2002:179). Furthermore, as NGOs and international advocacy groups are closely monitoring the PRSP progresses, parliaments in all logic, must be included in the participation process if the initiatives are to be promoted as being 'owned' by the country. This has been reflected in a report for parliamentarians as well:

Overall, though, the role of Parliaments in the PRS process has been limited. This has proved to be a cause for concern for many development partners. Several World Bank reports have raised the issue along with a number of development partners such as the Utstein Group of bilateral donors (the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Germany, and Norway) and the European Union. Individual parliamentarians also have raised this issue (Chevalier, Kingham and Trapp 2005: 43).

In reminiscing on the first experiences of the *Parliamentary Network on the World Bank*, which was created in 2000<sup>vii</sup>, Jean-Christophe Bas recalls that there were 'strong issues' right

from the start. Citing the Kenyan experience as an example, he evokes the tensions created by involving opposition MPs in the Network's platform and how the Kenyan executive strongly reacted (Interview November 17, 2006). It is true that the World Bank has traditionally shied away from direct engagement in democracy promotion and legislative attention. The obvious reason for such choice is rooted in Article IV of the IBRD Articles of Agreement, which clearly emphasises the apolitical nature of the Institution<sup>viii</sup>. As such, channels between Bank staff and reforming countries government have traditionally followed the executive branch. And as argued in the previous section, NGOs in a way had become a means of addressing the democratic deficit of bypassing parliaments.

However, there is now a clear shift in the Bank's perception of parliamentarians, at least discursively. Bas' statements are quite revealing of such fact. The Development Policy Dialogue manager indeed observes that the change on how the Bank's staff perceived parliamentarians was 'day and night' (Interview November 17, 2006). This change in perception of MPs is further argued by Jean-Francois Rischard, the World Bank vice-president for Europe, who claimed that there had been a 'revolution' in the Bank in the last few years (reported by Bretton Woods Project 2005).

While there is a crucial change brought forth by the IDM's focus on ownership and participation which has undoubtedly favoured a narrative focused towards parliament inclusion, the key question however remains to assess *how* exactly MP's are now to be involved in the PRS process. In turn, such analysis sets the scene for a deeper understanding of *why* the Bank has actually now chosen to embrace parliaments in its reform process. While the Bank's thirst for legitimacy for its backed policy reforms undoubtedly counts for an important part of its sudden interest in MPs, an analysis of the new functions assigned to MPs in the PRS process reveals an agenda that has sticking similarities with the depoliticised role assigned to civil society. It is here proposed to first look at the new roles assigned to the institution of parliament in the PRS process. An analysis of the consequences of such turn in the Bank's policies is then provided.

### 3.1 Integrating Parliaments Into the PRS Narrative

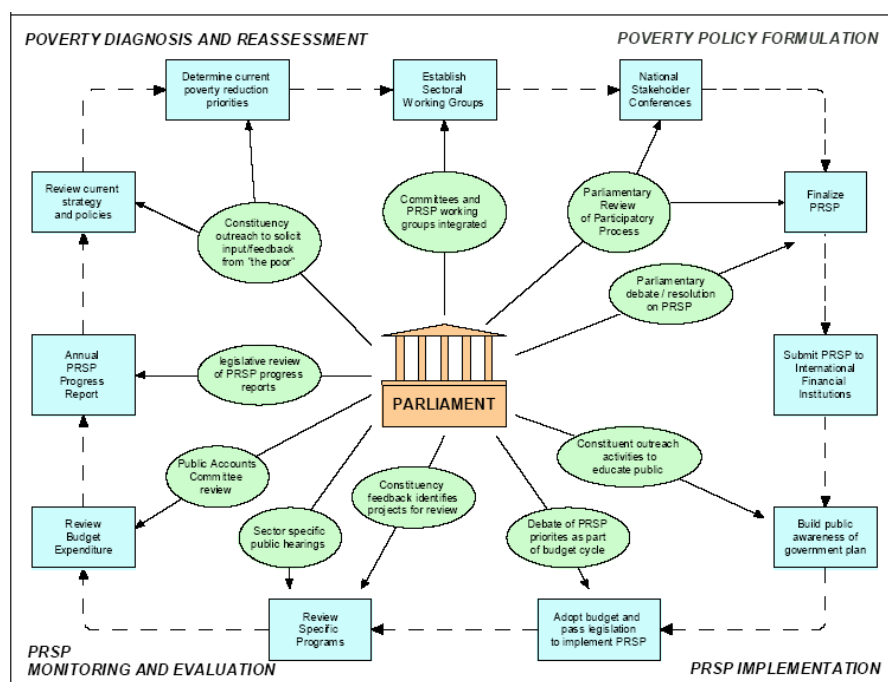
It is clear in the Bank's literature that there has been a shift in favour of engaging with MPs in the PRS process. However, in light of the IDM's instrumentalisation of the concepts of ownership and participation, it is imperative to unpack the Bank's take on parliamentarians' 'participation'. And this was precisely the point of Khalifa Ababacar Sall, a Senegalese MP and member of the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank who argued that the 'real question' about the PRS is 'why is this important to us to participate?' (Interviewed September 19, 2006) Sall observes that while he agrees that the PRS proposal for MPs participation is 'an evolution' of the World Bank, he wonders if the results won't be the same as the last 25 years of failed economic policies imposed by the multilateral institution: 'we are still poor' concludes Sall (Interviewed September 19, 2006). While the MP does think that: 'it is time to integrate the parliamentarians in the process if you want to succeed', he emphasises the need to know what role parliamentarian are to play in the process of policy formulation (Interviewed September 19, 2006).

A key element of the Bank's take on parliamentarians' involvement can be found in the *Sourcebook for Poverty Reduction Strategies* to which the Bank has recently added an annex (Hubli and Mandaville 2004) specifically dedicated to parliaments. Let us recall that the *Sourcebook* is a compilation of chapters that details the views of the Bank and the IMF on the PRS and intended as a guide for countries in strengthening their development strategies. Although the Bank asserts that the *Sourcebook* is intended to be only suggestive, it also states that it reflects the 'thinking and practices associated with the Comprehensive Development Framework, the *World Development Report 2000/2001*, good international practices related to poverty reduction, and emerging experience about the effective design and implementation of PRSP (World Bank n.d.: vii). In this respect, the addition of an annex in the *Sourcebook* specifically dedicated to parliaments should leave no doubt about the Bank's attempts to amend its former minimalist view of legislatures in the PRS process. The annex indeed recognises the pivotal role they should play:

Under most constitutions, legislatures are the most representative element of a country's national government. Although in some cases this representative potential has been latent or underutilized due to political conditions or lack of resources, parliaments remain an obvious mechanism for encouraging poor people's input into national poverty reduction policies and ensuring cooperation from a variety of political actors. The representative responsibilities of parliament, as assigned by each country's constitution, provide a greater level of ownership and legitimacy than other participatory methods, such as stakeholder workshops (Hubli and Mandaville 2004: 13).

As shown in Figure 1, the annex strives for greater involvement of parliaments in all four components of the PRSP cycle – i.e. poverty diagnosis, development, implementation process and finally, monitoring and evaluation of the PRSP.

**Figure 1**  
*Possible Mechanisms for Parliamentary Engagement in the PRSP Cycle*



Source: Hubli and Mandaville 2004: 5.

In terms of poverty diagnosis, the *Sourcebook* focuses on parliamentarians' capacity to 'provide the only political representation for large numbers of citizens from specific geographic or demographic constituencies' (Hubli and Mandaville 2004: 7). Under the rubric of contribution to development of the PRSP, the *Sourcebook* states that a greater involvement of MPs could lead to greater consensus on PRSP and thus 'pave the way for smoother implementation over time'. According to the *Sourcebook*, such involvement would not only result in a greater national ownership of the PRS process but would also provide the PRSP with an existing body of politically active national leaders and staff of varying skill levels and interests (Hubli and Mandaville 2004: 8). As for the PRSP implementation level, the *Sourcebook* calls for parliamentary involvement at three levels: budget allocations, legislation and educating the public about PRS processes, programs, and impact. It is stated that parliamentarians' main task should be to align national legislation with PRSP priorities, approve PRSP-compatible budgets and pass PRSP-relevant legislation (Hubli and Mandaville 2004: 12). The fourth and final component of the PRSP cycle – monitoring and evaluation – emphasises the role of Committee hearings on the impact of PRSP, an annual review of the PRSP Progress Reports.

The World Bank's renewed attention on parliaments warrants some caution. In his thorough analysis of the *Sourcebook's* annex, Youash observes that the suggested take on legislature has thrown the Bank's position from one extreme to the other, from a 'Rubber stamp legislature' to a 'Transformative legislature' (2003: 13). The key point to note is that if the Bank's previous framework gave few possibilities for legislatures to influence or debate the issues at hand, the annex propels legislatures – at least theoretically – towards its rarest type; one where bodies are capable of both representing and shaping societal demands (Youash 2003: 13). However, as stated by Johnson and Nakamura, this type of legislature is rather uncommon as it aims not only to represent but also to lead (1999). This requires a specific structure not only capable of dealing with differences, but that is equipped with information capacities permitting the initialisation of policies as well. Youash observes: 'Not surprisingly, there are not many examples of such legislatures, and those that do exist do not always live up to the requirements' (1999). While the *PRS Sourcebook's* annex on parliaments does

contradict such an interpretation, Youash further observes that the document mentions no implementation processes, an omission that clashes with the surgical attention the executive branch receives in the area of public expenditure in the *PRS Sourcebook*:

The difficulty with this leap [of the World Bank] is that no detailed road map is provided for such a transition and more importantly, no guiding logic is provided for making such a shift. [...] What is generated by such an approach is a rather hobbled together set of prescriptions with little substantive reasoning behind them and a seemingly naïve hope that demanding such a role of parliament will immediately necessitate its capacitation for fulfilling the proposed functions (2003: 14).

A clear conclusion here is that the Bank's outreach to MPs obviously greatly motivated by a need for bringing some legitimacy to the PRS process. Manish Bapna – Executive Director of the Bank Information Center – observes that the Bank had to recognise that its failure to reach out to parliamentarians was 'a real and honest threat' (Interviewed October 15, 2006). Bapna further argues that in the midst of a 'strong interest to reclaim the national policy space', the Bank's attempts to enter the national stage without the authority of doing so is the institution 'Hercules heel' (Interviewed October 15, 2006). The key question however remains to ask how exactly the Bank is bringing parliamentarians on board. Here the *PRS Sourcebook* suggests that MPs participation could be better understood via the narrow window of governance oversight in which parliamentarians are indeed invited to play a greater role. Beyond the Bank's enthusiastic narrative, this is a technical and depoliticised role that narrowly fits governance and anti-corruption objectives. Such analysis of the *Sourcebook* sets grounds for further questioning on the apparent apolitical nature of the IDM's interest in the institution of parliament.

### **3.2 Coopting Parliaments**

This depoliticised integration of MPs in the second and third generations of PRS may be further understood as a means to manage the veto gates that they represent within the PRS



process, as argued in this section. As such, this new enthusiasm towards MPs represents an attempt to coopt the institution of parliament in favour of the reform process.

During an extensive interview with Jean-Christophe Bas (November 17, 2006), who actively contributed to the creation and the design of the *Parliamentary Network on the World Bank*, it became clear that the Bank had realised that bypassing MP's was becoming a greater problem than not involving them. This is to say that beyond the legitimacy crisis in which avoiding the institution of parliament had plunged the Bank into, the multilateral institution came to realise that MPs represented a significant veto gate to the reform and that as such, they needed to be managed. Bas observes that MPs in the past would only be in contact with the World Bank in case of crisis, a fact 'which is not very conducive' (Interview November 17, 2006). Furthermore, the Bank's recent interest in parliaments is overwhelmingly linked to the very concrete fact that MPs in many countries have to vote on PRSP. On the subject, Bas underlines that:

MP's are decision makers. They represent a growing force in many countries. [...] some parliamentarians have to approve the Bank's loans which means that if a country director is confronted by a parliament that is reluctant to the reform, he is in a bad shape' (Interview November 17, 2006).

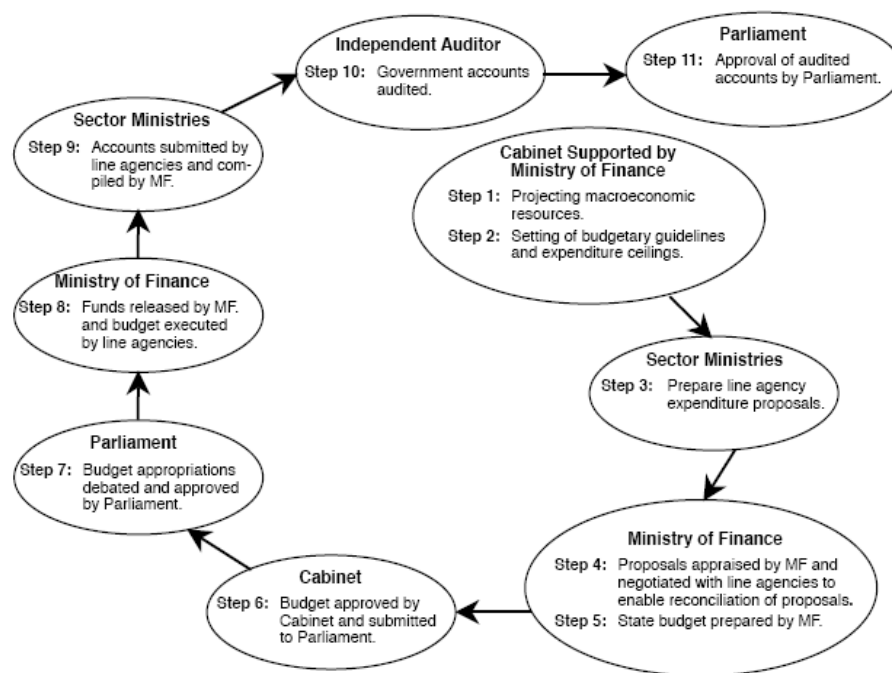
An obvious example of the problematic linked to the failure to involve MPs in the PRS process is the fact that in some countries, PRSPs have bluntly been anti-constitutional (Jones and Hardstaff 2005; Action Aid and coll. 2005). This is because PRS indeed often require secondary legislation to be passed. Let us recall that PRSPs are meant to direct a reforming country's policies for three years. Following an analysis investigating the role played by parliaments during the implementation of PRS in 28 African states, Eberlei and Henn state that the marginal role played by parliaments in Sub-Saharan Africa in PRS had indeed in some cases, breached explicit constitutional rights (2003: 9).

A greater involvement of parliamentarians throughout the PRS process would thus increase the chances for parliamentarians' endorsement if and when PRSP are submitted to

legislatures. As observed in the *PRS Sourcebook*: ‘A parliament that has already played an active role in the diagnosis and development of its PRSP will be better able to coordinate such legislation’ (Hubli and Mandaville 2004: 14).

With this in mind, an analysis of the *PRS Sourcebook* is quite revealing. It is indeed evident that that the *Soucebook*’s proposals for MPs involvement in the budget cycle is tailored precisely to manage the actors’ tasks in the PRS process. The *Sourcebook*’s chapter on ‘Public Spending’ outlines the Bank’s given ‘good practices in budgeting and public financial management in the context of implementing affordable pro-poor policies’ (Fozzard et al. n.d.: 189). It identifies eleven steps in an ‘idealised’ budget cycle, as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**  
*The Budget Cycle*



Source: Fozzard et al. n.d.: 192.

Out of these eleven steps, eight require solely the executive to act in policy formulation, one allows for the Auditor-General to review the government’s accounts, while the parliament’s

role in the budget cycle is relegated to the two remaining stages – i.e. steps seven and eleven (Youash 2003: 4). While these given functions are indeed important, they are however quite reductive as parliament's role remains marginal and deprived of any meaningful political contribution. In their study of the Tanzanian PRS process, Gould and Ojanen's do observe that the budget process is: 'an aid-conditioned exercise where the structures of power created by the iron triangle between donors, government and non-state actors leave the parliament without a proactive role' (2003).

The obvious similarities amongst the content of PRSP amongst reforming countries suggest that stakeholders' influence – both civil society and MPs – has been quite limited, a trend that might not change with an increased parliamentary involvement in the process, especially not a technical involvement as experienced in the last PRS. Hickey and Mohan's article on politics and participation is here important to mention (2005). The authors argue that:

[...] participatory approaches are most likely to succeed: (i) where they are pursued as part of a wider radical political project; (ii) where they are aimed specifically at securing citizenship rights and participation for marginal and subordinate groups; and (iii) when they seek to engage with development as an underlying process of social change rather than in the form of discrete technocratic interventions [...] (Hickey and Mohan 2005: 237)

A clear conclusion here is that while the PRS endeavour warrants a greater MP involvement, it is not on the basis of their political input as representatives of the people. When apposed to Hickey and Mohan's given success criteria for participation, one can conclude that MPs role in the PRS is in fact better understood as technical facilitators for the reform process. This brings forth the question of the legitimacy of a participatory process that neglects the democratic channels already in place. In a brief authored by a coalition of NGOs and parliamentarians, it is observed that:

Governments are supposed to lead the PRSP process, with the active participation of parliament and civil society. However, parliaments are regularly sidelined and key decisions regarding economic policies are often deliberately excluded from this process. Frequently, parliaments and the public are not even aware of conditions that will have

massive implications for their society. Worse still, the World Bank and IMF continue to over ride the express wishes of sovereign parliaments, undermining already fragile democratic processes and public faith in them (All Party Group on Heavily Indebted Poor Countries 2004: 1).

Experiences have revealed that even when MPs had indeed voiced their concerns regarding certain policy reform backed by the executive and the IFI, such concerns had rarely been taken into account. World Development Movement documented several examples of parliamentary opposition to IFI policies in Bangladesh, Cameroon, Georgia, Ghana, Honduras, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Moldova, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia<sup>ix</sup> (Jones and Hardstaff 2005: 28).

As such, Jean-Francois Rischard's – the World Bank vice-president for Europe – claims that there has been a 'revolution' in the Bank in the last few years in regards to MPs perception, take another meaning (reported by Bretton Woods Project 2005). While he argues that 85 per cent of country staff reported meeting with parliamentarians on a regular basis (reported by Bretton Woods Project 2005), he rather reffer's to the *World Bank Institute* efforts to 'train parliamentarians about how to improve their oversight role' (reported by Bretton Woods Project 2005). We are here far from a process where the representatives of the people are politically engaging in formulating their countries policies. It is therefore not without surprise to note the existence of an international petition signed by 1,100 MPs. It is calling for donors to acknowledge the importance of parliamentarians' involvement in the economic policies of their respective countries<sup>x</sup>:

We therefore call on the BWIs [Bretton Woods Institutions] and their principal shareholders to ensure that the democratically elected representatives of recipient nations are the final arbiters of all economic policies in their countries. It is vital that national parliaments in recipient nations have the right and obligation to be fully involved in the development and scrutiny of all measures associated with BWI activities within their borders, and hold the final power of ratification. Ensuring the primacy of sovereign national parliaments in this way will improve implementation of measures to reduce

poverty, enhance good governance, and foster democracy (All Party Group on Heavily Indebted Poor Countries 2004).

Beyond the issue of the erosion of the legitimacy of the already fragile legislature in countries under reform, the Bank's new outreach to parliaments is better define as an attempt to coopt MPs in playing a depoliticised role in the PRS process. As argued in the following section, this is an attempt which is embedded in the IDM's neopopulist agenda and such attempt brings forth questions linked to the very concept of citizenship.

#### **4. *Market Citizenship***

In this final section, the IDM is assessed in terms of its impact on representative politics. It is argued that the technocratic principles embedded in the IDM's governance imperative, combined with a neopopulist take on civil society must be viewed as an attempt to transform traditional notions of citizenship.

While the IDM is being promoted in terms of ownership and participatory principles, the analysis of the mechanisms rooted in the IDM clearly demonstrate neopopulist underpinnings. Neopopulism is here defined as a form of rule that seeks to bypass existing political arrangements and to introduce new forms of social contract to stakeholders deprived of any political role. Accordingly, it is a form of civil society consultation that has become the privilege source of policy legitimacy (Gould and Ojanen 2003: 93). It is a form of rule where individuals purportedly deal directly with policy-makers rather than operate through representative structures. The quest for decentralisation and local NGO participation is a clear instrument of such form of rule. After all, the IDM's list of suggested stakeholders for participation in the PRS reveals that the Bank views MPs as just another actor within an undifferentiated pool of stakeholders – i.e. the general public, the poor and vulnerable groups, an organized civil society, the private sector, the government and the donor community. In practice, the involvement of parliamentarians in the PRS process has been limited to being part of a checklist with other government stakeholders that are consulted along with line agency departments (e.g. health, education, social welfare, roads and works),

the necessary local governments, and state/provincial governments (Youash 2003: 6). The result is that an official democratic institution is levelled to other stakeholders such as NGOs.

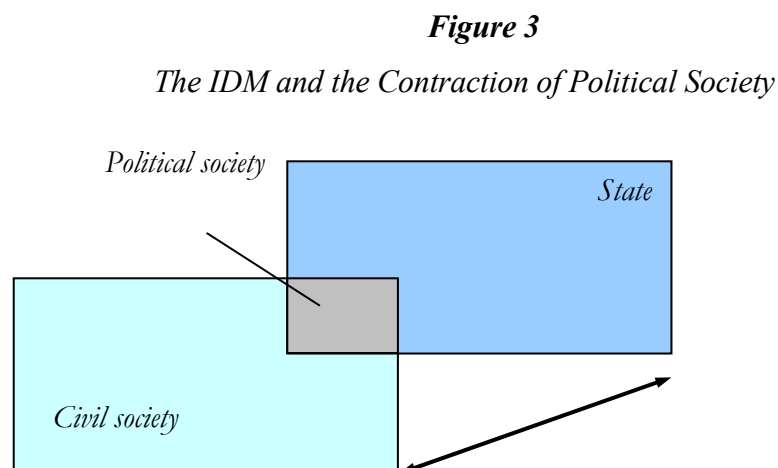
It is interesting that the *Sourcebook* does acknowledge that MPs have a distinct ability to ‘bring the input of local constituencies to the national level’ (Tikare et al. n.d.: 244). Such acknowledgment combined to the analysis of the depoliticised role assigned to the MPs at the national level suggests a form of neopopulist tendencies much similar to the IDM’s approach to civil society. Hence traditional arenas of political representation – such as the institution of parliament – remain marginal in terms of policy influence despite the framework’s rhetoric.

The neopopulist agenda brings forth serious implications for the conceptual absentee of the new aid agenda: citizenship. Under the neo-liberal model, the notion of citizenship is reduced to the technicalities of participating in the electoral process and in the market economy; a market-citizenship. Stripped from its political structure, participation is geared towards the market and, through an identity now downsized to that of producer/consumer, citizens are expected to maximize their individual interests. In such light, the ultimate right of the citizen is that of individual freedom – i.e. the state’s jurisdiction should be ‘restricted to a bare minimum as any positive role impinges on the rights of the individual’ (Taylor 1998: 24). As it was argued by Gill, the Bank’s enthusiasm for civil society participation represents an attempt to ‘legitimate a hierarchical and unequal system of representation in the making of state policy’ (Gill 2000).

The IDM here introduces a new type of ‘market citizenship’, one that does clash with the former post war social democracy model. What is key here to emphasise is thus the double transforming effect of the IDM on classical notions of rights and citizenship. The first one is linked to the neutralisation of the possible veto gates to the reform process. This is where for example new policies towards the depoliticisation of legislatures are actively pursued. This is also where key mechanisms of restraints are promoted deep within the state architecture, notably under the umbrella of governance reforms (Campbell 2005; Harrison 2004). Gill here observes that in such process: ‘the key areas of policy – relative to the “commanding heights”

of the economy and strategy are separated from real democratic participation and accountability'. This introduces the second transforming effect the IDM has on redefining citizenship which is the idea of channelling participation away from the realm of political society<sup>xi</sup>. This is where certain segments of civil society become key players, as well as new social welfare instruments such as microcredit<sup>xii</sup> and the overall emphasis on building social capital.

As illustrated in Figure 3, political society is this intermediate realm where actors (political parties) and institutions (election, legislature), are mediating, articulating and institutionalizing the relations between the State and civil society (Biekart 1999: 58). However, it is here argued that such realm is contracting under the IDM, as political power is being redefined both in the state apparatus and civil society. This is to say that in focusing on civil society, rather than citizenship, the IDM is able to bypass the realm of political society.



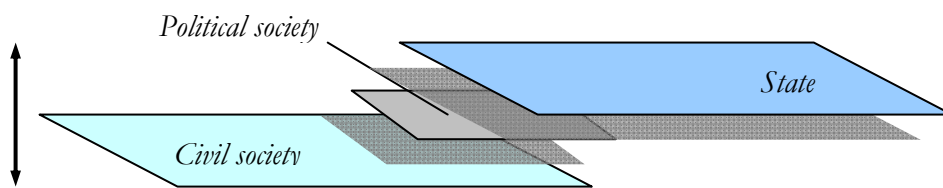
*Adapted from Biekart 1999: 34.*

This contraction may also be viewed as a process which dislocates the real of political of society from the state and civil society. What Figure 4 illustrates is a process where the technocratisation of the state coupled with the depoliticisation of civil society is creating a political vacuum between the state and civil society. It could thus be argued that the IDM aid

mechanisms specifically engineered to bypass the realm of political society in indebted countries. In this new model, civil society has an overarching importance, as it is the realm in which participation now takes place. As observed by Taylor, civil society has in effect become: ‘the primary site of socio-economic struggle, replacing political society as the key site of political struggle’ (Taylor 1998: 26).

**Figure 4**

*The IDM and the Technocratisation of the State and Civil Society*



The crux of this mutation from citizenship to civil society rooted in the IDM is the fact that the notion of rights – political, civil and socio-economic – is de facto evicted from the stage. Here the democratic rights of citizens to influence resource allocation is replaced by depoliticised local participation schemes which position certain segments of civil society where citizens use to be the main actors. As argued by Gill, the World Bank has developed its notion of ‘participation’: ‘to offset the limitations imposed on mass democracy in the economic realm by increasing democratic participation in other safely channelled areas’ (Gill 2000).

This current mutation from citizenship rights to targeting the poor depoliticizes issues closely related to power relations and resource allocation. As observed by Wood, the neoliberal view of civil society serves the objective of side-lining the concept of class: ‘to dissolve it in all-embracing category or even any political relevance at all’ (1990: 79) At the heart of this transformation resides the highly political question of who owns the legitimate right of making demands on the state. On a long term basis, this type of social management will



indeed be less expensive for governments who already have difficulties addressing their debt service. Luxury of another era or not, this tendency puts an end to the universal programs ideal and simultaneously narrows the population's legitimate spaces of political demands.

## **Conclusion**

If NGOs and more recently MPs are indeed being mainstreamed into the PRS process, the role they are assigned is overwhelmingly restricted to the narrow window of governance oversight, leaving little opportunity to influence the content of the strategies.

This process is illustrative of the Bank's decision that it may be more effective to coopt parliaments and certain segment of civil society within a functional, techno-managerial system, than excluding them from the entire process and thus risking future interference with PRS. The important point here is that civil society and MPs are not seen as a political site where interests organise to capture and overthrow or reorient the state, but rather as a useful watchdog deprived of political input.

In engaging strictly with such stakeholders that have been stripped of their political role the Bank is attempting to insulate from political competition a highly political and normative agenda for the reordering of social and political power. This is significant and rather concerning since the IDM hides highly contentious issues behind technical responses. The PRS framework indeed clearly isolates key political options from the democratic realm, such as specific choices linked to the welfare state (Girishankar et al. n.d.: 148). These represent clear constraints on democratic choices which confer privileged rights of citizenship and representation to corporate capital (Gill 1995: 8). The IDM further suggests that the civil society option is preferred to that of helping to build effective democracies.

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## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Other important aid allocation mechanisms rooted in the IDM are the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) – which is now referred to as the philosophy behind the IDM; the Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) and the Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA).

<sup>ii</sup> This is extensively argued in Hatcher 2006.

<sup>iii</sup> The Bank gives paternity to the rise of the new aid paradigm to its ninth president, James D. Wolfensohn (1995-2005). In 1998, Wolfensohn introduced the first corner stone of what was to become the institution's new 'aid paradigm': the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF). The new framework was expected to drastically change the way the Bank and indeed the other major donors, thought, planned and allocated international aid – a process that was soon to be extended to debt relief. Recognizing the pivotal role that should be played by state and civil society alike, this model would, according to Wolfensohn, put developing countries' governments back 'in the driver's seat'. See Wolfensohn 1999.

<sup>iv</sup> See the work of public choice economists such as Buchanan and Tullock (1962). See also Bebbington, Guggenheim, Olson and Woolcock (2004).

<sup>v</sup> Hearn's mapping of what she coins as 'Africanization of the NGO-sector' is interesting. She observes that by the end of the 1980s it became clear that the heavy white foreign presence was politically unsustainable and this led to the indigenization of the NGO-sector in Africa. She argues that since the private sector and the state were perceived as rent-seekers, the voluntary sector, with its significant inflows of external funding, had become the place to make money (2007: 1101).

<sup>vi</sup> Gelb observed during an interview conducted during the Singapore Workshop on the World Bank that in fact: 'the World Bank has not involved parliamentarian in the reform process' (September 18, 2006).

<sup>vii</sup> Created in 2000, the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank (PNOWB) is a network that aims to: 'encourage policy dialogue between legislators and the World Bank and the IMF, and to mobilize parliamentarians in the fight against poverty' (Parliamentary Network on the World Bank 2005).

<sup>viii</sup> The article states that: 'The Bank and its officers shall not interfere in the political affairs of any member; nor shall they be influenced in their decisions by the political character of the member or members concerned'. International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Articles of Agreement, Section 10, Article IV.

<sup>ix</sup> Details on these cases are available online on World Development Movement website at: <http://www.wdm.org.uk/democracy/parliament> (accessed December 17, 2007)

<sup>x</sup> According to the *International Parliamentarians' Petition* 2005 Annual report, by the end of 2005, the petition had been signed by over 1100 MPs in 55 countries. World Development Movement states that it has been endorsed by the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank; UK All-Party Parliamentary Groups on Debt, Aid and Trade, World Government and Overseas Development; the Committee for a Democratic UN; the Committee of the Parliaments of the Americas; European Parliamentarians for Africa; and numerous civil society organisations and networks. Online. Available at <http://www.wdm.org.uk/resources/reports/debt/IPPannualreport01022006.pdf> (accessed January 10, 2009)

<sup>xi</sup> The idea of the redefinition of political society is analysed in the very context of the PRS in the article Hatcher 2006.

<sup>xii</sup> On the subject see Weber 2005.